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NOT UNCLOTHED, BUT CLOTHED UPON

BY

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Sermons of James Freeman Clarke

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"Not that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."—2 CORINTHIANS v. 4.

THE doctrine of this text is that we do not wish to be disembodied spirits hereafter, but to have another higher body superinduced on this. I think the phrase indicates a desire for a process of gradual development instead of a sudden change, and that death does not mean that the soul has lost its body, but that a finer and more spiritual one shall be developed around the soul.

The body, in this passage, is first compared to a tabernacle—that is, a tent—and then to a building. The apostle means to say that the present body is like a tent, which is a mere transient residence: the body which is to be is like a house or temple, meant to stand for a hundred or a thousand years. Perhaps there flitted through his mind the idea of the Jewish tabernacle, or church tent, which the Jews carried with them through the wilderness,—a sort of travelling church, a movable chapel, where they had their sacrificial worship every day,—which was so made that it could be taken to pieces and put up again. The present body is like that. The body to come is like the Temple of Solomon on Mount Moriah, built of solid marble, immovable, incorruptible, undecaying.

No doubt the corruptible body weighs down the soul.

In one point of view there is no correspondence between them. They are deadly foes. Here is a poor soul struggling to reach some truth, some beauty, some love, some goodness, and it is imprisoned in a body which will not let it do so. The bodily organization is dull and heavy, is unvivacious, unrefined. It tends to irritability and wilfulness instead of sweetness and beauty. It is a tragedy in which we are all actors. The soul aspires, the body drags it down. We have gleams of heaven, we are caught up to God, and presently we find ourselves far down, with thick clouds of earthly gloom and mist between us. We have the treasure, but we have it in earthen vessels.

In all men there is some *hereditary depravity*. Some persons have a good deal of it, but they are not responsible for having it. They are only responsible for not trying to conquer it and cure it. If they indulge it, if they defend it, excuse it, lie about it, or try to make it out to be right, they make it their own, and become responsible for it, not otherwise. Their ancestors, a thousand years ago, may have been Norman pirates. From them still runs in their veins, perhaps, some rudeness of feeling or stubbornness of will. They are not to blame for this, but it is their business to refine themselves, to get rid of the rudeness, and to keep the strength. Their ancestors may have been dark fanatics, and have helped to burn witches or heretics, and so some black drops of that blood may make them wish to put down by will the reformers of to-day. But it is their business to put down, not the innovators, but their own feeling about them.

Nevertheless, the body is, with all its defects, the *cloth-*

ing for the soul. All *clothing* does, in some sort, begin to correspond with the wearer, and to express a little his tastes and ideas. We see a man's mind somewhat in his dress, just as we see it a little in his handwriting, in the way in which he speaks or walks, in the church he attends, the profession he chooses. These signs may sometimes fail, still they are signs. So there is a truth in the sciences of physiognomy and phrenology, though we may fail to understand them. The body has some kind of correspondence with the mind.

Thus the human body has some sort of analogy to the soul that wears it. You look at a face, you hear a voice, you see the gestures, and an impression is made on you of character. That impression is often the best and most reliable means of knowing a man's character. It is spontaneous. It shows it whether he will or not. He may try to conceal his purpose, but it speaks from his eye, it gives inflection to his voice, it inspires involuntary distrust. There is something false and hollow in the sound of this man's words, because his intention is false and hollow. There is something convincing in this other man's speech, apart from what he says. It is the sincere tone, the truthful emphasis, the inflection born not of the rhetorician's teachings, but of the pure soul itself. Men judge others by their actions. Women, more sensitive to the slighter influences, judge people by the impression received from them. They are very apt to be right in their judgment, for this impression is the effluence of the total nature, which we cannot make and cannot hinder, and which tells the story better than words.

Some persons argue as though this body were all bad,

and say that in heaven we shall have none, but be floating about the universe, pure disembodied spirits. Paul does not say *that*. He says the opposite: body is to remain, but the mortal part of it is to be swallowed up of life. Body, even in its lowest form, is a mystery of wonder. The human body is the most wonderful and beautiful thing on earth. It is a muddy vesture of decay, but it is also a transparent veil through which the soul shines. Look at it in little children, before it is degraded by toil or sin. What grace and charm in their looks and motions! See it in its ideal forms in the statues of Greece. What grandeur and dignity in the Apollo of the Vatican! What overflowing grace in the Amazon of the Capitol or the Flora of Naples! Now these forms give us hints of a more idealized and higher beauty. In the future life the body, "vital in every part, cannot but by annihilating die." Sown in corruption, it rises incorruptible. Sown mortal, it rises immortal. Sown weakest of all earthly creatures, needing clothing to keep out cold and houses to protect it from weather, unable to move through water like the fish, through air like the bird, behold, it rises into *power*, perhaps fleetier than the electric current, more luminous with thought than the sun with light, yet a body still, the *human* body still. Not unclothed, but clothed upon, mortality swallowed up of life.

A soul sheathed in a crystal shrine,
Through which all its bright features shine;
A soul whose intellectual beams
No mists do mask, no hazy steams;
A happy soul, that, all the way
To heaven, hath a summer's day.

The thought the apostle expresses, that we do not wish to be "unclothed, but clothed upon," is a very important one. It is an essentially Christian idea. It distinguishes the Christian view of morality from the natural view. It characterizes the Christian view of truth, the Christian view of religion, and the Christian view of immortality.

"Not unclothed, but clothed upon,"—let us see what it means.

The Christian view of all growth and progress is by addition, not subtraction; by building up, not pulling down; by positive means, not negative; by attraction, not repulsion; by love of good, not fear of evil; by hope of heaven, not terror of hell; by power of love, not power of law; by Christ as a forgiving and saving friend, saying, "Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more"; not by punishment, condemnation, and hell-fire. Christ came not to destroy, but to fulfil. The only condemnation Christ speaks of is loss of opportunity, that, when light has come into the world, some men choose darkness, and so lose the light.

Most reforms and inventions come by improving what we have. The first farmer probably stirred the ground with a sharp stick. After a while came a man who fastened another to it, and so made the original plough. By and by a piece of iron was substituted for one of the sticks, and that is essentially the plough of to-day. The first men lived in caves. After a while they made huts of branches and bark, then of stones, then log cabins, until at last you reach a palace on the Grand Canal of Venice. The wool from a sheep's back was twisted with the fingers, next with a distaff, then with a spinning-wheel, at last

the same thing is done by the spinning-jenny, and mule-spinning by steam.

The Puritans and Quakers tried to unclothe religion of all its rites and ceremonies. They took off its royal robes of architecture, painting, statuary, music, and left it bare. That was a mistake. They should have exchanged the earthly dress for a higher and more heavenly one.

This is the Christian principle, and it applies in a thousand ways.

Here is a boy who has done wrong. He is a culprit. He has stolen or he has committed some other offence. The law arrests him and puts him in prison. This the law must do, for the business of the law is to prevent offences, to keep them from going on and from getting worse. But the law cannot cure the criminal. It can only stop him in his evil course. After a while, law opens its hand again, and lets the criminal go. He is not cured, so he begins again, and falls into the clutch of law again, and is stopped again, and let go again, and begins again, and so on *ad infinitum*. That is all the law can do,—arrest evil, and check it for a while. It cannot cure it. It is merely negative power. But, to cure evil, a positive power is needed. You must show the boy some good thing. You must attract him toward a better life. You must give him an opportunity for something better. Law takes off for a little while his old clothing of sin. Christianity must clothe him with a house from heaven.

Any home is better than none. If you cannot get a house, take a cabin. If you cannot have a cabin, then have a tent; if not a wall tent, then a shelter tent; if not that, then find a tree or a cave.

Mentally, we do not wish to be unclothed, but clothed upon. Mental progress does not consist in losing the old knowledge, but in adding to it something new. The *principle* of conservatism is a sound one. Keep your present faith till you can gain a better one. The greatest of modern philosophers, Descartes,—the John the Baptist of all modern reform,—emptied his mind of all its belief in order to begin at the beginning. He started with no belief except in his own existence. “I exist,” was all that he would begin with. He thoroughly *unclothed* his mind of all its thoughts. But men are not made to live so. Anything is better than perpetual doubt. We have no mental progress so. “To him who hath shall be given.” The man who believes something can go on and believe more. A perpetual seeker, with no past behind him, finds nothing. He is ever searching, and never coming to the knowledge of the truth. Some things we must know, we are made to know them. The New Testament assumes that we know them, and does not teach them. Both Old and New Testament assume the existence of God, duty, and immortality. Some things may be taken for granted in our belief. They cannot be proved, and are not meant to be proved. Man is made to believe them, and cannot help himself. We must believe in our own existence, in the existence of an outer world, of day and night, men and women, space and time, cause and effect, the infinite and the finite, right and wrong, God and nature, duty and immortality. As a good father does not send his child out into the world naked, but gives him a trunk of clothes, a chest of tools, a little money to begin with, so God furnishes us with

a mental outfit of common and universal beliefs, to begin with. We are not to be unclothed of them, either in this world or in the next, but clothed upon with more.

All negation is going backward. It may be necessary to go back and to begin again, when we are going wrong. So negative reforms and negative moralities go backward in order to begin again. All the "antis" go backward, even anti-slavery. Society organized on *slavery* was badly and unjustly organized, but it *was* organized. The abolition of slavery disorganized society, and, if we had stopped there, we should have only taken a backward step, not a forward one. Free labor, therefore, had to be organized instead of slave labor; and, because the Southern States refused to accept free labor and organize it, it had to be done for them by the general government. Failing this, society at the South would have remained "unclothed, not clothed upon."

Look at nature in this affluent season of spring, when the voice of God is saying, "Let there be life." See how nature swallows up the old in the new. See how she absorbs the old vegetation in the coming grasses, how earth, bare and dead, is clothed upon with new and wonderful forms of growth. Little seeds in the earth have heard God's voice, and begin to stir inwardly. Little buds have heard it, and begin to swell. These million germs of life are to sweep away and clear up the vestiges of decay. Dead leaves and grasses are to feel the new summer. In a few weeks the whole surface of earth will be carpeted with grass and flowers, the trees clothed with delicate, fairy foliage, with fragrant, lovely blossoms,—mortality

swallowed up of life, a resurrection of dead Nature into a new existence.

The affections are a clothing and a home for the heart. God's method is to give us always better and higher affections, and to make the lower a step upward to the higher. "He who loves not his brother whom he hath seen, how shall he love God whom he hath not seen?" All human love leads up to divine love. It is a Jacob's ladder, leading up to heaven. Everything which draws man out of himself does him good. The smallest act of sympathy helps us. To say a kind word does him good who receives it and him who gives it. I see two little girls walking hand in hand. They are playmates. They play together, they study together, they quarrel sometimes, but they are little friends. That is the first round of the ladder of love, the highest step of which is the divine piety of Jesus towards his heavenly Father.

I see two young men, fellow-students, seekers of the truth together. They struggle through the same doubts, they have the same bitter experience of evil. They may commit mistakes together, but amid all errors and wanderings there is the golden thread of a generous, unselfish friendship for each other. That is good. Let them never be unclothed from that love, but clothed upon with a higher one.

Much of earthly affection is, no doubt, poor, weak, unworthy. It is idol worship. It is a blind and foolish affection. It is weak and changeable. But, such as it is, it is always better than nothing. Do not destroy it. Fulfil it.

I would be very tender of any idolatry. I often find

persons adoring very enthusiastically books or artists or people who to me seem poor and empty. But I am very careful not rudely to criticise their faith. They think some poetaster to be a great poet. Be it so. I will not say a word against it. They are groping after pearls. They think a man a great orator, and burn with enthusiasm for him, while to me he appears only a rhetorician, a man of words. Nevertheless, I say nothing harsh against their idol. They admire a preacher who to me seems talking verbiage and commonplaces. Well, who knows what real religion may come to them through this channel? We have this treasure in earthen vessels. I will not be an iconoclast, except when it is absolutely necessary. If truth requires me to blow a jarring and dissonant blast, I will do it, but not otherwise. Idolatry, in the divine order, may be the first step to true religion. Let it not be unclothed, but clothed upon.

All love, so far as it is love, is good; and it is good in this way, that it takes us out of ourselves, making us for the time unselfish, and also that it makes us for the time truly pure. Those who love are emancipated from doubts, hesitations, terrors. Perfect love casts out fear. Two friends who are together,—two school-girls, perhaps,—how they talk, how they flow out, how they say all that is in their heart! That does them good, and prepares for something better. With your friends you feel at home. You dread no misconstruction, no censure. You do not have to stop to explain, to define your position, to guard against misconstruction. There is no envy, no jealousy, in that relation. I do not think (as Cicero says) life is worth living that does not contain such a friendship.

Every one needs to be able to be with those, sometimes, to whom he can speak of anything he chooses, without any doubt or anxiety or hesitation. Then he is at home. That *is* home, the home of the heart.

So God educates us for himself, teaches us how to love him by teaching us first how to love our brother. All true love educates us for heaven. The love of nature is a nascent piety. The delight in God's sky and land, his ocean and mountains, his stars and flowers, his sunrises and sunsets, educates us to love him, the giver of it all. He sends us little children to teach our hearts tenderness. He takes them up to himself, and our tenderness goes up to heaven. The love for heaven, for books, for children, for friends, leads us towards God. Every patient watching by the bedside of those we love teaches the heart something. Every tear dropped on a friend's grave is another step towards heaven. Every generous effort to do right, every noble struggle against evil, every warm throb of love for what is good, true, fair, every patriotic and courageous act of devotion to our country, is clothing us with a house from heaven.

These may, indeed, be only tents to live in till we reach the promised land; but we know that, when these are struck and folded, we have a building of God waiting us beyond the veil of time. God, who provides the tent for us here, will provide the house there. He who gives us in this life the wonders and beauties of nature, the lessons of truth, the opportunities of action and endeavor, the helps of friendship, the charm of love, the nobleness of life and the pathos of death, will provide for us better things beyond, "which eye has not seen, nor ear heard."

Therefore, O human heart, trust and hope and look forward, and do not doubt nor fear, but go from truth to truth, from love to higher love. We do not wish to be unclothed of this world's affections and interests, but clothed upon with higher. This life is not the end, but the beginning. This poor body of ours, poor, but yet wonderful in its mysterious faculties, is the germ of a higher body. The friend who has left us, the dear child, sister, brother, father, mother, we shall meet again; and that divine grace which charmed our heart, when we enter heaven shall smile on us with a more profound and angelic beauty. The radiance which flowed from those eyes shall be more radiant. The inspiration which dwelt on that brow shall be more inspired. Yet that sublime and heavenly love shall be as tender and near as in this world, a home for our heart as it was below.

